

Desalination Task Force

Meeting #1 - Thursday, May 29, Sacramento

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting began with a welcome from the Task Force Chair, Jonas Minton (Department of Water Resources) and the Co-Chairs present, Tom Luster (Coastal Commission), Pete Silva (State Water Resources Control Board) and David Spath (Department of Health Services). (The fourth co-chair, John Sugar (California Energy Commission), was not able to attend but was represented by CEC Deputy Director Valerie Hall.) All Task Force members, or their designated alternates, attended the meeting except for Roger Briggs, who participated by telephone. Charles Keene, DWR, was introduced as the Executive Officer for the Task Force, and Greg Bourne, Center for Collaborative Policy (California State University, Sacramento), as the facilitator for the Task Force.

2. Review of Meeting Objectives and Agenda

Bourne noted three primary objectives of the first Task Force meeting: 1) initiate the Task Force and clarify its overall objectives, 2) assure all the key issues and perspectives are accurately portrayed in the Issues Assessment report, and 3) chart the course for the next five months (Phase 1 of the Desalination Task Force). He then provided an overview of the agenda for the meeting.

3. Review and Approve Task Force Protocols

Bourne presented seven meeting protocols to guide Task Force meetings. These were: 1) Make every effort to attend every meeting; 2) Listen for “interests” conveyed by others; 3) Ask questions that help clarify other’s interests or concerns; 4) Keep focused on Phase 1 objectives; 5) Refrain from “sidebar” discussions; 6) If speaking to the media about this project, convey your point of view without characterizing the views of others; and 7) Keep cell phones in the off position. Bourne asked for and received approval of the meeting protocols by Task Force members.

4. Overview of the Task Force

Jonas Minton provided a brief overview of the Task Force’s scope and objectives. He noted AB 2717, the enabling legislation for the Task Force, identified the Department of Water Resources (DWR) as the lead agency. DWR invited four other agencies (as noted above) to serve as co-chairs and help guide the work of the Task Force given their central role in regulating desalination facilities. He summarized activities leading up to the first Task Force meeting, including preparation of the Draft Issues Assessment Report by Bourne, who interviewed more than fifty people from more than forty organizations as part of the assessment.

He added that due primarily to funding constraints the Task Force would take a “phased” approach to its work. The first phase will primarily focus on “fact-finding,”

assuring all key issues associated with desalination in California are identified and fully understood by Task Force members. The second phase would then focus on developing policy recommendations, a critical component of the Task Force's work as outlined in the enabling legislation. Jonas noted the Task Force is currently undertaking Phase 1. Phase 2 is dependent on obtaining the additional funding needed to develop and thoroughly analyze policy recommendations.

After a brief discussion by Task Force members, Jonas offered three observations. First, he felt it unlikely the Task Force would either recommend blanket approval of all desalination facilities or blanket rejection of any desalination facilities. Decisions to approve desalination facilities need to be made on a case-by-case basis, with appropriate guidelines. Second, the work of the Task Force is not intended to stop current desalination planning and permitting efforts. It is presumed these efforts will proceed following existing planning and permitting procedures while the Task Force continues its deliberations. Third, although it cannot be expected that Phase 1 will lead to any policy recommendations, the Task Force should try to capture any obvious solutions to issues identified.

Greg Bourne then summarized the collaborative process envisioned to guide the work of the Task Force. Five meetings are planned as part of Phase 1. The first "kick-off" meeting will be followed by three, two-day working sessions addressing the key issues identified in the Issues Assessment Report. A final one-day meeting to take stock of progress and discuss Phase 2 will bring a close to the first phase of the Task Force's work. He noted that although Phase 1 is primarily fact-finding, Task Force decision-making (when it occurs) would be consensus-based rather than rely on voting to reach conclusions or recommendations.

5. Public Comment Period

6. Clarification and Discussion of Key Desalination Issues

Bourne then led a discussion of the key desalination issues, as highlighted in the Draft Issues Assessment Report. An Issues Summary was prepared to guide the discussion. The additions and refinements suggested by the Task Force will be directly incorporated into the revised Issues Summary, which will be on the DWR Website for additional review and comment. Therefore, this section attempts to highlight the discussions rather than list all the potential revisions.

- Brackish water desalination needs to be given equal attention to ocean and estuarine desalination
- Since environmental issues are threaded throughout all the issues, they will not comprise a separate section
- A new section on Public Health will be added
- The importance and value of water reliability, potentially derived from desalination, should be noted for both communities and the economy
- Desalination should be considered in the context of conservation, recycling and similar approaches to addressing water supply, i.e., desalination should not be a disincentive to these forms of expanding water supplies
- The cost of water, and its quality, should be equitable for lower-income communities

- Desalination of irrigation water, while not the central focus of the Task Force, should be addressed in some fashion
- The distinction needs to be made between “impediments” that are intended as safeguards and those that may act as unintended barriers to desalination.

7. Next Steps

Dates, topics and tentative locations were established for the remaining Task Force meetings in Phase 1. These are:

- June 24-25, Southern California area: siting, feedwater and outfall issues
- July 29-30, San Francisco Bay area: desalination technology, energy and economic issues
- August 26-27, Monterey area: permitting/regulatory and planning issues *
- October 17, Sacramento: Phase 1 wrap-up and next steps. **

Working papers are planned for each of the major issue categories, serving as the framework for discussions at each working session. Presentations on critical issues of concern are also planned to help provide the foundation for more meaningful discussions.

After the final public comment period, the meeting was adjourned.

* The new Public Health category will be added to this session

** The location for this meeting is subject to change